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AUTHOR Darcy, Robert L.
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ABSTRACT

For most Americans the pursuit of happiness begins with the simple fact of a good job. Manpower policy is aimed at improving job opportunities and earning for the American people. To help young people bridge the gap from school to work we must assist them not only to acquire vocational information and job skills, but we must also help them to understand the broad socio-economic environment in which they will work, as productive human resources, and live as men and women. A program of manpower education approaches the study of work and the economic system from the point of view of man in his capacity as a human resource, functioning on the productive side in the economic process where the creative instinct of workmanship may be expressed. Its dual objective is manpower development and socio-economic understanding of the world of work. An example course centers around the world of economics, technology and change, economic and noneconomic dimensions of work, rational decision making and career planning, the manpower market, occupational opportunities in the U.S. economy, and manpower skills and the economic value of education. Students taking the course showed a change of attitude, increased knowledge, and a positive course rating. The course is limited in that it cannot do the entire job for successful labor force participation, and it is designed to meet only the general needs of secondary students. (Author/SLD)

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HELPING YOUTH BRIDGE THE GAP FROM SCHOOL TO WORK THROUGH MANPOWER AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION*

Robert L. Darcy**

Although work is not life's heart and soul, it may nevertheless be true that for most Americans the pursuit of happiness begins with the simple fact of a good job. And a good job is one that not only provides adequate and secure income, but also meets certain other human needs of men and women who work -- such as providing the worker with a sense of personal usefulness, a feeling of participation in the socio-economic system, and real opportunity for human development and personal fulfillment.

Manpower policy, as it has evolved in the Sixties, is aimed primarily at improving job opportunities and earnings for the American people -- by assisting men and women to become more employable and productive through education and training and improving the processes by which workers and jobs are matched in the manpower market.

But a truly comprehensive human resource policy must strive for grander goals than merely expanded job opportunities and higher earnings. As the United States Department of Labor acknowledges in its 1968 Manpower Report, we must seek to improve the quality of employment. We must be concerned about the extent to which employment satisfies the needs -- physical, psychological, and social -- of the individual, rather than merely meeting the requirements of profit-minded employers and the production-oriented economy. We must view employment in the total scheme

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**Professor of Economics, Colorado State University, Fort Collins.

of life rather than in the isolation of the work environment, and develop a greater sensitivity to both the adverse physical and mental effects of work and the extent to which work can be a positive, beneficial, developmental experience for the men and women who participate as human resources in the productive side of the economic process.

Programs of occupational orientation and vocational education, we know, can help men and women become well-trained, employable, productive, self-supporting workers. If conditions are favorable at the macro level of the economic system -- for example, if correct fiscal and monetary policies are implemented to assure a full-employment level of aggregate demand; and if things go well at the micro-organizational level -- for example, if private and public enterprise adopt equal-opportunity employment practices and provide career-development programs; then the stage is set for programs that operate at the micro-individual level -- including vocational education, occupational orientation, work experience, vocational counseling, mobility, job information and placement, post-placement support, and career development. The outcome of a successful meshing of macro, micro-organizational, and micro-individual policies from the viewpoint of the system as a whole will be full employment with high productivity. From the individual viewpoint the results will be men and women who are employable, who have the motivation to work, who can find and hold jobs, who are productive, earning a decent income, and who derive a measure of satisfaction, enjoyment, and fulfillment from work itself.

We have a long way to go before every American worker is adequately oriented to the world of work -- adequate even in terms of preparing people for successful labor force participation based on jobs and earnings.

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But -- as the Department of Labor has suggested -- we are particularly remiss when it comes to orienting workers to the qualitative aspects of employment, helping them develop a meaningful perception of the relationship between the individual as worker and that portion of man's socio-economic environment that prescribes and constrains his work behavior. To help young people bridge the gap from school to work we must assist them not only to acquire vocational information and job skills, but we must also help them to understand the broad socio-economic environment in which they will work, as productive human resources, and live, as men and women.

Social scientists will perceive that I am suggesting now something that goes beyond occupational education. I am referring to economics and economic education. Work is part of the economic process and is therefore a legitimate subject for economists to study and to teach. But the world of work takes in more than just economics -- employment involves far more than a process of earning an income and helping produce goods and services. Work is part of economics, but more than economics. World-of-work education is part of environmental or ecological education, focussing on man's relationship to his social environment rather than on his physical environment. It is more than occupational orientation and vocational education.

The purpose of manpower education, as my colleague Phillip Powell and I have termed this area of instruction, is to help young people develop human resource competence along with a holistic understanding of the world of work or wage-employment system: i.e., the socio-economic institution of working for pay in modern industrial society -- to become competent as workers and comprehending as men and women.

A program of manpower education, as exemplified by the experimental course and textbook, MANPOWER AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION*, approaches the study of work and the economic system from the point of view of man in his capacity as a human resource, functioning on the productive side in the economic process where the creative "instinct of workmanship" may be expressed. Its dual objective is manpower development and socio-economic understanding of the world of work.

The desired outcomes of such an educational program for young people relate to a wide range of understandings, attitudes, and behaviors that will affect employability, motivation, employment, productivity, job tenure, earnings, work satisfaction, human development, social orientation, and the whole quality of employment and of life for individuals and the nation. For disadvantaged youth, the practical benefits of manpower education can be escape from poverty; for middle-class youth, expanded freedom and prevention of alienation; for all youth an awareness of the creative values of work (in terms of productive contributions that individuals can make to society), secure and comfortable levels of living, socio-psychological satisfactions, and human development and fulfillment. Manpower education can help reduce rates of involuntary unemployment, subemployment, dependency; and more positively, manpower education can promote social progress by expanding productivity and enhancing the quality of employment and of life for the entire community.

Of course, education is no panacea for society's ills, as students of poverty and human resources have learned. The same caveat applies to vocational orientation or manpower education. But education helps, and the facts prove it. Indeed, if you will agree that more knowledge is better than less, and that a functional

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knowledge of the world of work in the "neurotic-trillionaire" economy of the United States in the 1970's is not simply picked up casually in the course of living to age 18 or 22, then a prima facie case exists for manpower education in the schools -- to provide young people with the awareness, information, and skills needed to cope with the work environment (in which they will spend one-third of their waking hours for 40-odd years of their lives).

Let me turn now to an identification of the kinds of information, awareness, and skills that are included in a program in manpower education -- specifically in the manpower and economic education program that was originally developed under the title: "Manpower Development: Opportunities in American Economic Life" as part of a curriculum project co-sponsored by the U. S. Office of Education and officially labeled: "A Junior High School Course in Occupational Opportunities and Labor Market Processes".*

The one-semester course was developed and initially field-tested in Ohio during 1966-68. The instructional group of students consisted of approximately 600 eighth graders, 100 ninth graders, and 50 tenth graders enrolled in the Zanesville, Lancaster, and Columbus, Ohio, schools.

Content of the 75-lesson course was organized around seven major themes:**

I. The World of Economics (21 lessons, 28% of the course)***

II. Technology and Change (4 lessons, 5% of the course)

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*USOE Grant No. OEG 3-6-051203-2080, Vocational Education Act of 1963, P.L. 88-210, Section 4 (c)

**For a more complete statement of course content see Robert L. Darcy and Phillip E. Powell, MANPOWER EDUCATION IN A GROWING ECONOMY, Center for Economic Education, Ohio University, Athens, 1968, pp. 5-42. A shorter description appears in Robert L. Darcy, "Manpower in a Changing Economy". AMERICAN VOCATIONAL JOURNAL, Vol. 44, No. 3, March 1969, pp. 57-60.

***There is some double counting since certain lessons are considered to contribute equally to more than one basic theme.

III. Economic and Noneconomic Dimensions of Work (Nature of Work) (15 lessons, 20% of the course)

IV. Rational Decisionmaking and Career Planning (11 lessons, 15% of the course)

V. The Manpower Market (10 lessons, 13% of the course)

VI. Occupational Opportunities in the U. S. Economy (13 lessons, 17% of the course)

VII. Manpower Skills and the Economic Value of Education (9 lessons, 12% of the course)

The Classes were taught by the regular school staff: one teacher with multiple sections in each of eight buildings. Only one teacher was over 30 years of age, and the seven younger teachers averaged three years of experience. Except for summer workshops in economic education, none had taken courses in manpower economics, vocational education, or occupational education.

Preliminary evaluation of the course was carried out to determine its effects on the understanding, attitudes, and behavior of the students who were enrolled. Instructional and control groups were established, matched by mental ability. A 40-item multiple choice instrument entitled "Manpower Economics Test of Understanding" was constructed, checked for reliability and validity, and administered pre and post to the treatment and control groups. The 600 eighth-grade students who took the one-semester course increased their mean score on the test by 40%, the control students increased their mean score by 6%, so the instructional group showed a net gain of a little over 33%.

To determine the effect of the instructional program on student attitudes toward world-of-work opportunities, institutions, policies, facts, and values, an agree-disagree instrument called "Survey of Manpower and Economic Attitudes" was prepared and administered pre and post to the instructional and control groups. Results showed that eighth graders enrolled in the course changed their opinions

on 21 statements out of 62 included in the survey (34%) whereas students in the control group changed their responses on only 11 statements (18%). Subsequent analysis of the data indicated that students who took the course developed greater concern for the wellbeing of workers, awareness of the role of social institutions, and the importance of formal education than did the control students.

A third evaluation instrument was designed to elicit ratings and comments on the course itself. Three and one-half times as many students rated the course "outstanding" or "above average" as rated it "below average" or "poor". Overall, the eighth, ninth, and tenth graders judged the course to be exceptionally valuable in terms of their future decisions and actions. They regarded the course to be above average in interest and below average in difficulty. The students involved in the Ohio experiment covered the full range of ability, and there was no real consensus among teachers, guidance counselors, and principals as to whether the course was most valuable for below-average, average, or above-average students. The program is not slanted towards any particular group, and we feel that it offers substantial educational benefits for both the disadvantaged youngster -- whose observation and knowledge of the world of work and the economic system may be quite limited and distorted -- and the so-called middle-class youth, whose perceptions of economic reality, including the dignity and value of work, also are known occasionally to reveal some distortion.

The experiment did not attempt to study short-term behavioral changes under carefully controlled conditions. Follow-up studies are contemplated for the eighth-grade students four years after enrollment in the experimental course (i.e., during the final year of high school) and again after entry into the labor force. One short-run behavioral outcome of the course, however, is worth noting here. In the case of the 55 tenth graders enrolled in the course -- identified

by their school counselors as underachievers and potential dropouts, with an anticipated dropout rate of 30-40% -- only three students, or 5.4% actually dropped out by the end of the school year. The teacher and guidance counselor responsible for this group stated that the experimental manpower course was a major factor in keeping these students in school.

At this point I want to clarify and emphasize the objectives and the limits of the manpower economic education program. Its purpose is to help students develop an understanding of the economic process and the role of work in the life of man. This includes awareness and exploration of the many dimensions of work and various activities involved in preparation for work. The course is limited in that it does not attempt to do the entire job of preparation for successful labor force participation. Other school programs -- such as "general", "academic", "vocational", and "occupational" courses and curricula; occupational orientation; vocational guidance; career exploration, planning, and development; skill-tool-task exploration; the whole cluster of programs related to world-of-work education -- must continue to bear their own special responsibilities for helping young people bridge the gap from school to work. The program is also limited in the sense that it is designed to meet only the general needs of secondary school students, not the special needs of particular groups such as American Indian, Spanish-speaking or Negro youth; small rural schools; or inner-city schools. Teachers having special responsibilities or interests vis-a-vis such students may find it necessary to supplement the MANPOWER & ECONOMIC EDUCATION lessons with additional information from other sources, and may find it desirable to delete parts of the existing course. What the MANPOWER & ECONOMIC EDUCATION program offers in its present form is a system-oriented course of study that is beyond the planning stage: it already exists in usable form, has been carefully tested and evaluated, and has demonstrated its

feasibility and effectiveness for junior and senior high school students over a period of two to three years in a number of schools that have adopted the program.*

Now let me emphasize again the rationale and potential benefits associated with this type of world-of-work or manpower education course.

We live and work in a socio-economic environment that is demanding, highly productive, personally threatening, and potentially dehumanizing. Our efficiency-oriented economic system is based on specilization, inter-dependence, technological change, growth, and private monetary gain. There are 80 million people in today's American labor force; and hardly a man, woman, or child in this nation of 200 million is untouched by the vicissitudes of employment and the work system. Virtually all males and almost as many females can expect to spend a substantial part of their adult lives in the labor force -- creatively producing our trillion-dollar GNP.

But what do America's youth learn about the changing world of work -- either from direct experience or from classroom instruction? My observation is: Most of them learn very little. What can we do to help young people develop a practical, realistic, and personally meaningful perception of the

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*Approximately 50 school systems had adopted the MANPOWER & ECONOMIC EDUCATION program, in part or in total, by the spring of 1970. Zanesville, Ohio, has three full years of experience with the program; Little Rock, Arkansas, is one of the larger systems with two years of experience with the course, including a television series based on the text; limited use has been made of the program in the Denver, Colorado, schools; Baltimore, Maryland, is scheduled to introduce the course in September, 1970; and the Oregon State Board of Education has expressed interest in the program. More complete information on adoption and use of the MANPOWER & ECONOMIC EDUCATION program may be obtained from:

Prof. Phillip E. Powell, Director
M. H. Russell Center for Economic Education
Henderson State College
Arkadelphia, Arkansas 71923

work system? I believe we can help them to learn, just as we help them to learn mathematics, geography, office skills, and home economics. Specifically, what contribution can the junior and senior high schools make in helping prepare young men and women to bridge the gap from school to work? They can provide opportunities within the curriculum and outside, for exploration and learning about the facts, concepts, principles, and values associated with the world-of-work. As suggested in the 1968 Manpower Report of the President, we can insure that every schoolchild acquires more knowledge about the environment of work while he is still in school; and we can help young people begin to prepare for occupational selection not later than the junior high school level -- as a process of increasing their knowledge about the world of work, not by forcing premature occupational decisions.

The recommendations of the Advisory Council on Vocational Education underscore this same philosophy and strategy of helping bridge the gap from school to work by calling for a program of "economic orientation and occupational preparation . . . with study of the economic and industrial system by which goods and services are produced and distributed" involving all junior high school students.

The plea for economic education in the schools is not new, though the manpower, world-of-work approach is somewhat novel. But if it is true, as author Robert Heilbroner asserts, that "the changing shape of the world of work is the economic challenge" facing the U. S. in the Seventies, then we need to respond to that challenge by instructing our young people in the principles, facts, values, opportunities, and demands associated with the socio-economic institution of working for pay in our modern, dynamic industrial society. Given

the nature and severity of the crisis that confronts our nation, a crisis in values, we can't afford to be cynical about the widespread lack of public understanding of how our market-type economy operates. We need widespread economic literacy, and manpower understanding, to help solve the problems of "the neurotic trillionaire" -- the not-inaccurate title given to the U. S. economy by a British journalist-author. For Mr. Nixon's America does display neurotic behavior, not merely in terms of inflation, unemployment, high interest rates, vacillating fiscal and monetary policies, but also because of the blemishes and socio-psychological pathologies that accompany America's trillion-dollar affluence: the poverty, urban decay, youth unemployment, insecurity, environmental pollution, civil disorder, alienation, anomie, nihilism. Clark Kerr, a highly esteemed labor economist, commented recently (in a slightly different context): "To do something, you have to know something." There is much wisdom in this advice for American society in the Seventies. To do something in the world of work -- to participate successfully in the economic process as a worker and income earner, and to help adapt and improve the system in the face of changing technology and economic growth -- it is necessary that you understand the structure and operation of the system, and the effects it has on the life of man.

It seems to me just as mistaken to turn American youth out into our modern industrial world without instructing them in some fundamentals of its values, institutions, procedures, opportunities, and challenges as it would have been for the fishermen of Gloucester 150 years ago to send their sons to sea with no knowledge of marine weather, the stars, fish, boats, bait, tackle, and ocean lore. Without an understanding of the marine environment, Gloucester youth would have

perished. Without an understanding of the industrial environment in which they must work and live today, young men and women simply can't be expected to function effectively and meaningfully within that environment -- as workers and as human beings, with competence, self-confidence, self-esteem, a sense of identity and participation. On the contrary, lacking instruction and preparation, they become vulnerable to the personal and social tragedies of unemployment, insecurity, social incompetence, dependency, feelings of powerlessness, alienation, the signs of which we already observe around us. Education is no panacea, manpower education is no panacea, but greater understanding in so crucial an area as the world of work would seem to merit priority status in the changing curriculum of our nation's schools as we seek to prepare young people for the decade of the 70's and beyond.

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M. H. RUSSELL CENTER FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION
Henderson State College
Arkadelphia, Arkansas 71923